



SOCIAL CARE AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

APRIL 2008

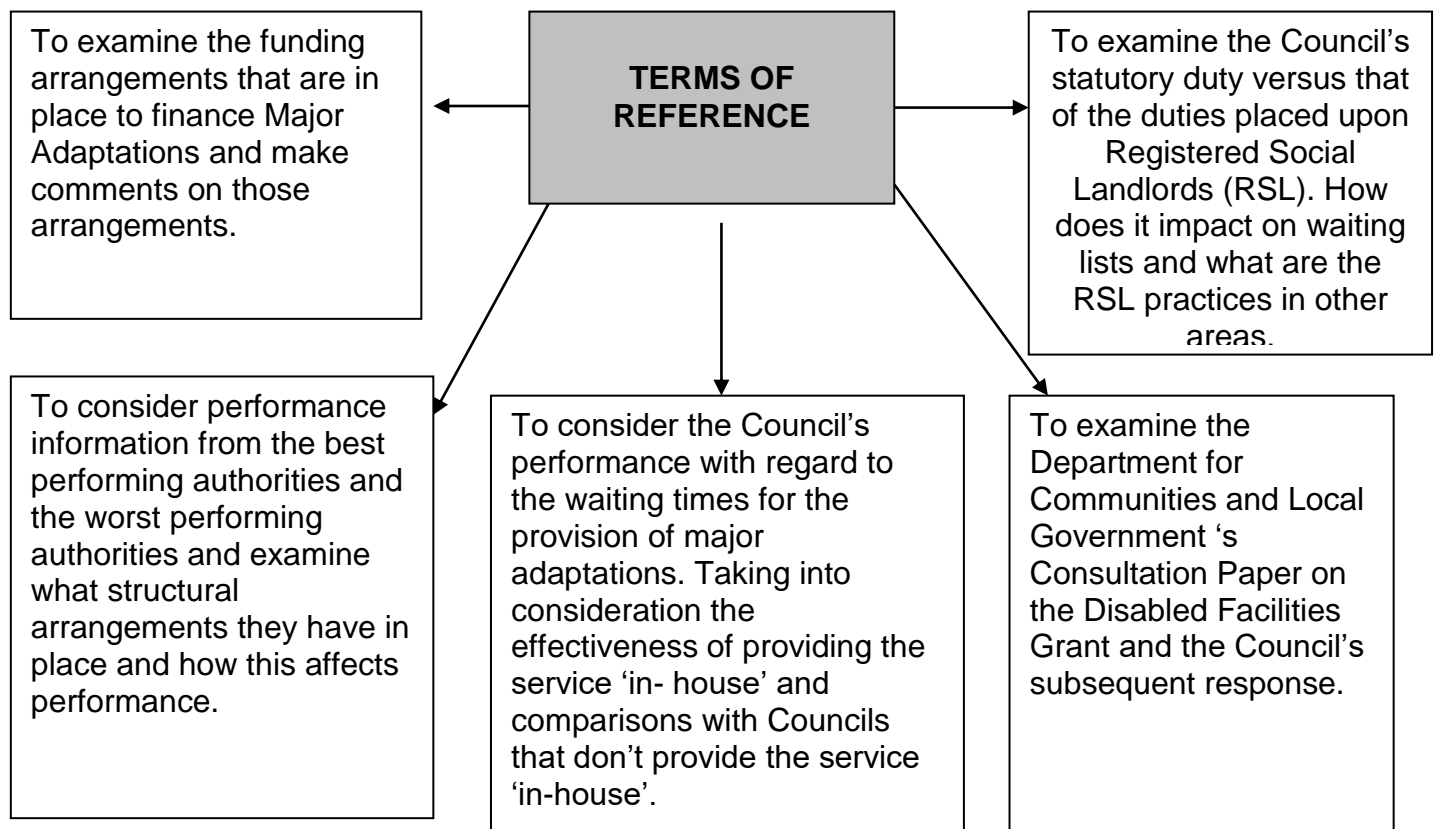
FINAL REPORT – MAJOR ADAPTATIONS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the findings of the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel's review of Major Adaptations.

AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

The aim of the review was to consider the length of time people have to wait for the provision of major adaptations to their home, whether the wait is acceptable and if not, consider how waiting times can be improved.



METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

4. Members of the Panel met formally between 16 January 2008 and 18 March 2008 to discuss/receive evidence relating to this investigation and a detailed record of the topics discussed at those meetings are available from the Committee Management System (COMMIS), accessible via the Council's website.
5. A brief summary of the methods of investigation are outlined below:
 - (a) Detailed officer presentations supplemented by verbal evidence.
 - (b) Benchmarking information compiled by officers
6. The report has been compiled on the basis of their evidence and other background information listed at the end of the report.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

7. The membership of the Panel was as detailed below:

Councillors C Rooney (Chair), Councillor P Porley (Vice-Chair), Councillors Davison, Dryden, Dunne, Jones, Purvis and Rostron. Co-opted member E Briggs

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

8. In January 2008, the Social Care Department reported that the service had been awarded a Three Star Rating (based on a scale of 0 to 3 stars) by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). Representing a signification achievement by the Department. Not only was the 3 star rating maintained but the quality of service and prospect for improvement was rated as 'excellent'.
9. The Department then drew up an action plan to show how it intended to address the issues that had been raised in the inspection. In that action plan one of the issues that had been highlighted for attention was that people in Middlesbrough had to wait several weeks more for the provision of major adaptations than in other councils and that the Council should work to reduce waiting times. The Council were tasked with reducing the waiting period to less than 32 weeks by March 08 and reducing the number of people waiting to less than 300 by March 08. In order to progress the recommendations the Council had a number of actions in place and some actions that had been completed.

Performance

10. The panel learnt that the increased budget for 2007/08 had enabled a greater number of cases to be delivered and had a positive effect on the waiting times for service users. Occupational Therapists (OTs) had reported a reduction in waiting times for an initial assessment from 29 weeks to 4 weeks since the appointment of additional staff. The Staying Put Agency also demonstrated that the average time from referral to grant approval reduced from 35 weeks in 2006/07 to 27 weeks in 2007/08.

11. The panel was however concerned about the long waiting time period and especially when it was compared to waiting times from other authorities. However the panel was very interested in how the figures for waiting times had been collected because evidence suggested that Councils were not being compared on a similar basis, and this issue is explored in further detail within the report.

What is an Adaptation?

12. One of the key aims of the Government's Community Care Policy was to, where possible, help people who are elderly or disabled, to stay in their home homes. For many older and disabled people, their home might need certain equipment and adaptations in order to help them to be able to live independently.
13. For the purpose of the review the panel chose to concentrate on the provision of major adaptations, which involve adaptations that cost more than £1,000.
14. In practical terms this could involve the structural modification to a disabled resident's home or the removal of a bath and the installation of a level access shower or the installation of a stair lift for example.
15. Adaptations can have a highly beneficial effect on the quality of people's lives. They can for example
 - prevent admission to residential care
 - support independence
 - avoid unnecessary hospital admissions through the prevention of falls
 - increase self-confidence, dignity and self respect
16. The panel learnt that there was a duty placed on Social Services Departments under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Act 1970 to arrange practical assistance in the home and any works of adaptation or the provision of additional facilities designed to secure greater safety, comfort or convenience.
17. Since 1990, local housing authorities have been under a statutory duty to provide grant aid to disabled people (this would be subject to a test of the applicant's resources) for a range of adaptations to their home. The grant aid is given in the form of the Disabled Facilities Grant as prescribed by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.
18. Social Services Departments also had a duty to ensure that the financial assistance required by disabled people is secured. This means that Social Services funding could go further than what is available though the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). In those circumstances Social Care may award a top-up grant to enable the work to proceed.

Referrals

19. There are currently about 20-30 cases being referred each month in Middlesbrough with an average DFG cost of £5,200. The panel learnt that at present the demand exceeded the current budget.

Tenants of Registered Social Landlords

20. The panel learnt that the Council's duty to provide grant aid also extended to the tenants of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). When the Council's stock was

transferred to Erimus housing the transfer agreement stated that Erimus must fund the first £500,000 of any adaptations required to their stock for each financial year before directing their tenants to apply for a DFG. For all other RSLs operating in Middlesbrough the Council would ask the RSL if they would be prepared to fund the cost of the adaptation before a DFG is progressed although RSLs have no statutory requirement to do so. Again, the issue will be explored in further detail within the report.

The Process

21. When a person contacts the Social Care Department with a query about an adaptation they will be referred to an Occupational Therapist (OT). OTs have a thorough understanding of disabling conditions and how a disability impacts on a person's everyday life. An OT would visit a client in their home to gain an understanding of how the property either helped or hindered the person's everyday living and observe the activities that the service users found difficult.
22. If the difficulties that are identified can't be resolved by an alternative way of undertaking the problem or the use of minor equipment designed to overcome a specific problem then an adaptation would be recommended. The OT would then send the referral to the Staying Put Agency detailing what was required and how urgent it was.
23. The panel learnt that in the past a Best Value review outcome had encouraged joint working. A small team of OTs had therefore since been based in the Housing Service and worked closely alongside the Staying Put Agency to provide an integrated adaptations service.

The Role of the Staying Put Agency

24. The panel learnt that the Government had encouraged Local Authorities to set up arms-length Home Improvement Agencies (HIA). HIAs would be tasked with providing support and assistance to disabled residents in order to adapt and improve their homes. In 1990 Middlesbrough's Housing Service set up an in-house HIA called the Staying Put Agency. The Staying Put Agency had since been awarded the Foundation's Quality Mark for excellent customer service.
25. HIAs are small, locally based, not for profit organisations. There are over 300 in the UK and can be referred to as 'Care and Repair' or Staying Put ' Schemes. They can be managed by Housing Associations, Local Authorities, Charities or Independent Management Committees.
26. Once a person had been referred to the Staying Put Agency by an OT, then they would be offered a comprehensive service which takes the service user through the complex DFG application process, whereby all the necessary paperwork would be completed on the applicant's behalf. That would also include application forms, financial information, architect's drawings, planning permission etc. Applicants are also issued with an information which included details on service standards, clients rights and the complaints procedure etc.
27. Once the work is underway the agency would then also monitor the progress of the work, arrange payment and ensure that the work is completed to the satisfaction of both the technical officer and the service user. In addition to this the agency also

provides a link to other complementary services such as benefit checks, a handyperson scheme and various energy efficiency projects.

28. The panel was told that the benefit of having the integration between the Staying Put Agency and the OTs meant that a quicker service could be provided.

The Role of the Housing Service

29. One of the Housing Service's statutory roles was to provide grant aid to disabled people for adaptations to their home in the form of DFGs. Upon receipt of the DFG application from the Staying Put Agency the Housing Service must ensure that the submission constituted a valid application as prescribed within the legislation. The application must receive a formal approval or be refused within 6 months of receipt by the Housing Service.
30. The Housing Service also has a wider role in promoting social inclusion for example it would work with its partners to ensure that new housing developments met the needs of people with physical disabilities and the Service would assist people to move to more suitable accommodation.

THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

TO CONSIDER THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE WITH REGARD TO THE WAITING TIMES FOR THE PROVISION OF MAJOR ADAPTATIONS

31. The panel considered the following table that shows the average length of time service users waited for adaptations from the assessment to the work beginning. The table had been provided by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) at the request of the Head of Older People and Physical Disabilities specifically for the purpose of this review.

Table 1

PD045 - Promoting Independence: Average length of time waiting (in weeks) for major adaptations from assessment to work beginning		
Council	06/07 Outturn	07/08 Plan
Gateshead	6.5	6.0
Leeds	13.3	13.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	13.4	11.0
Doncaster	13.7	8.3
Kingston upon Hull	14.0	13.0
Darlington	14.4	10.0
Sunderland	15.4	13.4
North Tyneside	16.0	18.0
Durham	17.0	16.8
Barnsley	19.0	18.0
Northumberland	19.1	18.0
Redcar & Cleveland	20.2	20.2
Kirklees	21.1	20.0
York	23.7	25.0
Stockton-on-Tees	24.5	23.0
South Tyneside	25.1	23.0
Sheffield	26.1	26.0
North East Lincolnshire	27.0	27.0
Wakefield	27.0	25.0
Hartlepool	27.9	25.0
Rotherham	31.7	28.0
North Yorkshire	33.0	30.0
Calderdale	34.0	30.0
Middlesbrough	35.4	32.0
East Riding of Yorkshire	47.0	40.0
North Lincolnshire	48.0	47.0
Bradford	52.0	48.0

Analysing the Table

32. The panel debated the results of the table in some detail. It quickly became apparent that the figures did not compare like with like. For example the figures didn't distinguish between councils that had their own housing stock or the amount of capital each authority had.
33. The CSCI had provided the statistical data on the request of the Council however they agreed that there were some inconsistencies in the data. The CSCI agreed to meet with officers to establish if there was a consensus in the information that had been submitted.
34. For example, If Middlesbrough Council had been able to include Erimus' figures in their overall timescale then the overall picture would be better. In comparison with Gateshead's 6.2 week waiting time figure, the panel learnt that in Middlesbrough the Council had to fund adaptations through the DFG route which was a process that took more than 6 weeks.
35. The figures also didn't take into account demand, capital available and the number of staff. The demand for adaptations was high in Middlesbrough and there was never sufficient money to be able to clear waiting lists from year to year. Unfortunately waiting can lead to frustration and anxiety and the panel was concerned that people's needs could escalate if they had to wait for their adaptation for prolonged periods of time.
36. The Council had made a commitment to reduce the 35-week wait and this was demonstrated in the provision of extra staff and funding, at the time of the review the panel were informed that the addition of extra staff and funding had reduced the wait to approximately 27 weeks.
37. The panel was informed that the statistics within the table also made no measure or comparison on the quality of the service between authorities. For example, in Middlesbrough they had a practice which involved their surveyor 'signing off' projects to ensure that they have been completed correctly, although this process may take extra time. In some organisations they don't follow this practice and the contractor signs off the work. There was also evidence of differences between councils about the level of information that was collected for the grant application.

Waiting Times

38. The Staying Put Agency had reported that the waiting time for DFG within the financial year 06/07, from receipt of enquiry to approval of grant, was 35.4 weeks. In 2007/08 the Agency received a significant boost in capital resources, which led to a significant reduction in the waiting list. Funding was also received from the Resource Led Performance Management Fund in order to appoint additional staff required to spend the allocation. The following table shows how the waiting times from July had improved. The waiting times from April to August were high due to the staff not being in place until the end of June.
39. This table shows the recent improvements in waiting times

Table 2

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
April	30.8	30.2	25
May	18.3	37.6	26.4
June	32.7	32	38.7
July	40.3	37.4	41.8
August	33.8	23.3	40
September	45.1	32.5	25.7
October	57.4	30.2	24.3
November	26.6	50.3	24.8
December	26	46	24.4
January	37.1	31.1	24
February	28.8	37.5	21
March	37.7	36.4	
Total Average	36.4	35.4	28.7

40. The panel learnt that a benchmarking survey had been undertaken to try and identify how other authorities were able to deliver DFGs in a shorter period of time and establish if any lessons could be learnt. The survey raised a number of questions and further highlighted that not all authorities were reporting on the same basis. It was acknowledged that further work was required to identify what the Council could do in terms of improving performance.
41. One of the initial steps that was taken was to arrange for the Staying Put Agency to meet with representatives from CSCI in order to clarify what data can be included within the indicator. Early conversations with CSCI indicated that adaptations carried out via Erimus Housing could be included in the figures (and this was to be confirmed).

Meeting with Commission for Social Care Inspection

42. Officers from the Council's Social Care Department and the Staying Put Agency met with a representative of CSCI in April to discuss the performance indicator PD045 and the waiting times for adaptations. CSCI confirmed that the indicator was not used as a comparison tool and did not contribute to the Council's overall performance.
43. It was explained to CSCI that a benchmark survey had been carried out by officers at the Council in order for them to compare how they delivered their services to the other councils/agencies who delivered the DFG programme and how differently they operated. CSCI acknowledged the work that had been carried out and that they would use the information to look further into what other authorities are reporting on.
44. CSCI agreed that there were discrepancies in how the information was collated and now that it had been brought to their attention it would be helpful in discussions with social care departments in forthcoming months. The Social Care Department would therefore log information on major adaptations as an issue in the performance assessment notebook that accompanies the Self-Assessment Survey (SAS). The SAS is completed every May and feeds into the social care star rating system. The

Social Care Department would ensure that they put this as an agenda item in the business meeting with CSCI later in the year.

Consideration of How Waiting Times Can Be Reduced

45. The panel was interested in officers' views about how the waiting times could be reduced. The panel was advised that one of the most significant areas of impact was the boost in capital resources, which had led to a reduction in waiting time. The funding ensured that more staff could be employed.
46. The Staying Put Agency also had discussions with Building Control about the approval of Building Regulations for extensions. Building Control had progressed applications within a short period of time, however there was no formal process to monitor the speed of applications. The Agency and Building Control were to explore the issue further.
47. Obtaining proof of ownership from the applicant was also another issue that could delay the process. It was hoped that the introduction of the 'I World' print out would ensure a more speedier clarification of a service users home ownership. It was hoped that Audit would be satisfied with the provision of the I World printout and a utility bill would be accepted as proof of ownership.

The Tender Process

48. The panel was concerned that the application of the current tender process for each job was delaying the process. Under current Corporate Standing Orders Policy the Staying Put Agency were able to request one estimate if the work cost less than £5199. However the Agency were concerned that getting just one quotation could not ensure that they were getting value for money. The panel was informed that the agency therefore requested three quotations for each job (not including stairlifts).
49. In the case of the provision of level access showers, work had been undertaken with Stockton Council to develop a framework contract for the supply and installation of showers. The Middlesbrough element however had yet to be awarded. The Council was also working with Stockton Council on the development of a framework contract for the supply and installation of portable ramps.
50. The panel considered that a register of adapted properties could be a good way of rehousing people in to more suitable accommodation rather than adapting their house when there could be properties already adapted that are laying empty.
51. The panel was told that the Staying Put Agency had worked with local estate agents to develop a register of adapted properties in the private sector. The Staying Put Agency also had a disabled persons re-housing service which offered cash incentives to owner-occupiers to encourage them to move to adapted properties where it was appropriate. However this scheme was due to come to an end in March 2008 but the ethos of the scheme would continue in line with the Government's recently published guidance on DFGs.

Internal Performance Indicators

52. The agency were working on a review of adaptations in line with the Communities for Local Government: 'Delivering Adaptations: A Good Practice Guide.' Within the document there was a set of indicative targets that had been given to compare and improve the service.

53. Officers had already considered how waiting times could be produced and presented to the panel some initial proposals on how the service could be improved internally.
54. Officers outlined the different improvements that could be made within the internal processes which if they were able to work to the timescales outlined for each step of the process would see an overall waiting time of 25.4 weeks.
55. However officers reminded the panel that waiting times could also be affected by external factors. Cases are only actioned if there are sufficient capital resources to be able to fund the project. The speedy completion of application forms is dependent on the information from clients and whether or not they have the information available or if they have to request details from banks etc. Once the grant has been approved, there would have to be an element of time taken into consideration regarding the builders work commitments which may not allow them to start on site immediately.
56. The service recognised that in order to achieve targets that internal performance indicators needed to be set up and then monitored.

TO CONSIDER PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FROM THE BEST PERFORMING AUTHORITIES AND THE WORST PERFORMING AUTHORITIES AND EXAMINE WHAT STRUCTURAL ARRANGEMENTS THEY HAVE IN PLACE AND HOW THIS AFFECTS PERFORMANCE.

57. The panel learnt that Middlesbrough Council delivered its major adaptations service via its Adaptations Team which comprised of officers from Social Care, Housing Service and the Staying Put Agency. The Staying Put Agency was an in-house Home Improvement Agency (HIA) where the staff are employed directed by the Council. The Agency however has its own identity, advisory group and written procedures.
58. The panel learnt that officers had undertaken an initial exercise to compare the relative performance of internal and external HIAs in terms of the Social Care indicator 'Average length of time waiting for major adaptations from assessment to work beginning' See table 3.
59. Of the 25 North East local authorities contacted, 15 had a HIA operating in their area. Of those, 12 were external agencies and 3 that were operated in house by the local authority. Accurate comparisons between the performance of each authority had been difficult to establish because the role of the HIA, waiting lists and capital budgets could vary substantially between areas. It was also crucial that Members noted that some of the authorities might have been including details of the adaptations undertaken to their own stock which was a much quicker process than making an application to the DFG.
60. The panel had requested further benchmarking evidence, which was undertaken by officers. The panel were advised that the survey officers had undertaken had been a really useful tool for them. However in undertaking the exercise officers had uncovered more questions. Including that the CSCI had been unable to confirm whether local authorities had been able to include adaptations to RSL properties

where a DFG was not required. (In the course of the review this led to officers seeking clarification from CSCI as to whether or not they could use adaptations made to Erimus properties in their figures)

Benchmarking with other authorities

61. The benchmarking exercise was undertaken to explore the waiting times in more detail and to determine how Middlesbrough's Staying Put Agency compared with against other agencies within the North East. Officers chose to contact 6 other local authorities as follows:

Table 3

Home Improvement Agency	Authority	No of weeks waiting time
Non HIA	Gateshead	6.5
HIA	Sunderland	15.4
Non HIA	North Tyneside	16
HIA	NE Lincolnshire	27
Non HIA	Stockton	24.5
Non HIA	Redcar	20.2

62. Following examination of the data received as part of the benchmarking process officers expressed the view that by comparison Middlesbrough was providing a good service, which guaranteed quality assurance and prevented fraudulent claims.
63. The survey had found that North East Lincolnshire operated a service very similar to that in Middlesbrough, but one of the differences was that North East Lincolnshire's capital spend had not fluctuated over the years which had led to them being able to manage their waiting list more effectively. North East Lincolnshire had also included the provision of minor adaptations in indicator PD045 which had improved the outcome of their statistics, due to the fact that the target time for supplying minor adaptations was 7 working days.
64. Gateshead Council had a waiting time of 6.5 weeks and the panel were interested in finding out any areas of best practice to establish how they had such a short waiting time. It was noted that within Gateshead the way in which the DFG was delivered meant that their waiting times were shorter. In Gateshead the Occupational Therapist obtained all the necessary drawings and estimates, which were then forward to the grants team. This then reduced the amount of time the Grants Officer needed to spend on the DFG. Members expressed a concern about this and officers expressed the view that the onus to obtain quotes and undertake discussions with architects should not be placed on OTs because their skills lay in other areas.

TO EXAMINE THE COUNCIL'S STATUTORY DUTY VERSUS THAT OF THE DUTIES PLACED UPON REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS (RSL). HOW DOES IT IMPACT ON WAITING LISTS AND WHAT ARE THE RSL PRACTICES IN OTHER AREAS.

65. The panel learnt that there is no statutory requirement for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to provide adaptations unlike the statutory duties placed upon

Councils. In Middlesbrough Erimus, the organisation that took over the Council's stock, had a pot of money specifically to fund adaptations. As part of the transfer agreement Erimus Housing must fund the first £500k of any adaptations that are required to their stock in each financial year before directing their tenants to apply for a DFG. Erimus had their own assessor and the panel was told that waiting times were going down and that they were providing a good service.

66. The panel had a number of questions regarding the funding Erimus had available. Panel members wanted to know if Erimus carried over any underspend in the allocation for adaptations. Erimus did not carry monies over to the following year, however they had always spent more than the actual budget to date each year. The terms of the transfer agreement sets out the maximum expenditure in any one year and therefore the sum allocated is not index linked.
67. The panel asked whether or not this agreement was revisited at any point. Erimus stated that it was on the agenda for the Housing and Homeless meeting which takes place on a regular basis.
68. The government's consultation paper points to RSLs being encouraged to fund adaptations but there was nothing to suggest that they would be made to do this. If a RSL does not undertake the adaptation then the Local Authority would have a mandatory duty to do so.
69. All other RSLs are asked if they can fund the cost of the required adaptation before a DFG was progressed and the Government propose to give RSLs greater responsibility in this regard in future legalisation. However at present there is no legislation that forces landlords or RSL to provide a house that's fit for purpose. If the resident has an assessed need for an adaptation than the obligation to provide that adaptation falls upon the Council.
70. The panel learnt that the Housing Corporation (HC) had confirmed that there was currently no statutory requirement on RSLs to provide adaptations. The HC Capital Funding Guide stated however that 'as good social landlords the Corporation would expect (RSLs) to provide their tenants with adaptations where required'
71. The panel was presented with a table which outlined the practices of the RSLs in this area. Budgets ranged from £4,000 per annum to £424,000 per annum and waiting lists varied from non to a couple of months to 2 years. The majority only undertook minor adaptations. **The table is attached at Appendix 1.**
72. The panel was interested in what could be done to ensure that builders of new homes took into account the long term future needs of a particular house. The panel learnt that was now a Lifetime Homes Standard that was introduced in 1997 that states that new build dwellings must be built to a certain standard to reduce the need for adaptations that may be needed later on. However at present those standards were not statutory.

TO EXAMINE THE FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS THAT ARE IN PLACE TO FINANCE MAJOR ADAPTATIONS AND MAKE COMMENTS ON THOSE ARRANGEMENTS.

73. The panel was interested in how the adaptations were funded and they learnt that there was quite a complex funding system in place. The Government gives local

authorities an annual allocation of Specified Capital Grant (SCG) to support the Council's expenditure on DFG.

74. The SCG allocation constituted 60% of the Council's budget for DFG. The other 40% had to be match funded from the Council's own capital resources. The panel learnt that this 40% had traditionally been drawn from the Single Housing Investment Pot (SHIP). SHIP resources were accessed on a sub-regional basis via the development of sub-regional housing strategies and were allocated by the North East Housing Board.

Funding Issues for 2008/09

75. At the time of writing it had been announced that the SCG award would increase by approximately 15% for 2008/09. In order to maximise the increase the Council would have to increase its match funding. In addition to this it was reported that the Council's SHIP resources would be reduced in 2007-10 in order to re-distributed at a national level to support affordable housing programmes. As a consequence of that it was thought that alternative match funding would need to be sought.
76. The announcement of the allocation was expected in February 08 which then made alignment with the Council's capital and revenue budget planning processes problematic.
77. It was explained that the demand for DFGs had, in the past, exceeded the resources that were available. That had caused a delay in the provision of adaptations and had led to some cases being carried forward to the next financial year.

Staffing Issues

78. The number of staff required to deliver the DFG programme was dependent on the actual capital allocation. In 2007/08 the Council received an increased DFG allocation and was able to appoint additional staff funded by an award from the Council's Resource Led Performance Management revenue funding. The extra resources and staff had led to a decrease in the waiting time for service users.

TO EXAMINE THE DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S CONSULTATION PAPER ON THE DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT AND THE COUNCIL'S SUBSEQUENT RESPONSE.

79. The panel was interested in considering the proposed changes to the DFG. The Communities and Local Government Department published a consultation paper 'Disabled Facilities Grant Programme: The Government's Proposals to Improve Programme Delivery' in January 2007.
80. The main points for consideration in the document were
1. joint working, individual budgets and means test
 2. government funding for DFG
 3. Reforming the DFG including greater fairness and flexibility
 4. Issues concerning the delivery of housing adaptations
81. The Housing and Social Care departments prepared a joint response to the consultation document that included the views of service users and other

stakeholders which had been gathered during an event to launch Middlesbrough's Older Persons Housing Strategy.

82. The panel was presented with the response to the consultation. In general the Council welcomed the recommendations for change as demand for adaptations in Middlesbrough was high and it was anticipated that the flexibilities proposed in the consultation paper would afford authorities the opportunity to address the needs of their area and help to reduce waiting times.
83. The Council welcomed a number of the proposals which included
- the proposal to establish Individual Budgets to incorporate DFG, Community Care Services, Equipment and Minor Adaptations, Independent Living Fund, Supporting People and Access to Work
 - The consolidation of the means tests for the DFG and the Fairer Charging for Care
 - The re-badging of the DFG to become the Accessible Homes Grant
 - That the Social Housing Grant should be redistributed through the central DFG fund and that RSLs contributions towards DFG should be monitored
 - That the DFG limit is raised to £30,000 to take into account escalating construction costs
 - That the installation of stairlifts be re-designated as equipment rather than adaptations

UPDATE

84. While the panel was undertaking their investigations the Government published the Lifetime Homes Lifetime Neighbourhoods Document on the Department of Communities and Local Government website on 25 February.
85. There were a number of beneficial changes as a result (due to be implemented in April 2008) which were outlined to the panel as
- The 60/40% split method of funding will cease to exist. The Council will receive 1 amount and there will be no requirement on Councils to match fund and Councils will have greater flexibility as to how this money is spent. Which could mean that extra staff could be employed which would help speed up the process.
 - The DFG would be paid through via the Single Capital pot
 - The maximum limit for the DFG was raised from £25,000 to £30,000
 - The means test process has been streamlined.
86. The changes were viewed as positive, as it reflected the need for local choice and local priorities. However Members were concerned that if there was no obligation for the Council to match fund then the money normally allocated in the budget for the Councils 40% could be viewed as a saving. However it was stated that the 40% funding normally given by the Council would be ring fenced in the budget to still cover the costs of adaptations.

CONCLUSION

87. Based on evidence given throughout the investigation the Panel concluded:
- a) It became apparent that the figures which had been provided from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (which showed the average waiting

times in a number of Local Authorities) were not an accurate reflection of the current situation. The basis of the information submitted varied from Council to Council and therefore the panel were unable to use the figures in a meaningful comparison because they could not compare like with like.

- b) One of the main influences on the waiting times was that of funding. Where capital spend had been stable it had helped councils to manage their waiting lists more effectively.
- c) The panel gained an understanding of the resource pressures that officers faced in providing the service.
- d) The panel considered that the current process for tendering of adaptations work led to unnecessary delays in the process. The panel thought that there could be a more streamlined way of reorganising the process so a tender did not have to be sought for each new adaptation.
- e) The majority of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) only undertook minor adaptations, however unfortunately there was no statutory duty on RSLs to provide adaptations, the responsibility ultimately lay with the Council.
- f) That the panel considered that there were clear policies and procedures in place for the assessment and management of adaptations. However the panel thought that there were areas where improvements could be made.
- g) The panel thought that the checking process for the selection of contractors seemed excessive. Members thought that if contractors had been chosen from a list of reputable preferred providers the panel thought that it would be appropriate to undertake spot checks on perhaps 1 in 10 of cases. This would be for quality assurance purposes and then staff should contact the rest of the service users by email or telephone to ensure that they were happy with the work rather than each case having to be signed off by a surveyor.
- h) The panel thought it may be more economical to redecorate an existing home which had already been adapted and was lying empty and make it attractive for someone to move into rather than to add a new adaptation and that people should be given the option to move.
- i) The panel also thought that if modern style adaptations were carried out in keeping with the house such as 'wet rooms' then those adaptations were less likely to need to be taken out at a later date if they were no longer needed, saving time and expenditure. The panel hoped that this would also reduce the stigma that could be associated with disabled modifications. The panel, whilst bearing in mind the funding implications, recognised the aspirational nature of this approach. The panel recognises the significance from the change from the Disabled Facilities Grant to the Accessible Homes Grant.
- j) The panel welcomed the positive changes that had been introduced by the Government in the Lifetime Homes Lifetime Neighbourhood Report and hoped that the changes would have an impact on the service and ultimately improve waiting times.

- k) However the panel were concerned that under the new guidelines that match funding from the Council was no longer a requirement.
- l) The panel thought that it was important that homebuilders adhered to the Lifestyle Homes Standards by ensuring that when they built houses that certain modifications are included where possible. For example no steps at the entrance, lower light switches etc. This would make homes more easily adaptable in the future and at less expense.

RECOMMENDATIONS

88. That the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive:

- a) That the Council should establish a target for waiting times which is no more than the 25.4 weeks as outlined in the indicative performance targets that had been submitted to the panel.
- b) That the Council maintains the level of funding to the service equivalent to previous levels of match funding.
- c) That the Council investigate ways of speeding up the process to reduce waiting times, this should include
 - i) considering the results of the benchmarking exercise and analysing the current role of Occupational Therapists in the process to see if there is scope to widen their remit or to review the staffing structure to employ an administrative worker to support OTs if their role is developed.
 - ii) That new ways of signing off projects should be investigated, for example undertaking spot checks of 1 in 10 projects and contacting service users to ensure the work is carried out satisfactorily rather than each project being signed off
 - iii) Work with Building Control to establish a formal process to monitor the speed of applications.
 - iv) Reviewing the Tendering Process, to establish if it is necessary to tender for each new project.
- d) That the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are encouraged to undertake and fund adaptations without referring applicants to the Disabled Facilities Grant. In return the Council would help support the RSLs through the process.
- e) That the Council should pursue a policy of developing accessible homes for the future and work with social housing providers to encourage them to adhere to the lifetime homes standards.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

89. The Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our investigation. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named:-

- Janine Turner, Strategic Housing Service Manager
- Andrew Carr, Housing Assistance Team Leader
- Phil Dyson, Head of Older People and Physical Disabilities
- Tracy Smithson, Occupational Therapy Team Leader
- Suzanne Hodge, Staying Put Agency
- Karen Bowees, Occupational Therapy

**COUNCILLOR CHARLES ROONEY
CHAIR OF THE SOCIAL CARE AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

April 2008

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:

- (a) Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: Housing in an Ageing Society – Department of Communities and Local Government, February 2008